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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that a discrepancy exists between the perceptions of school psychologists and teachers concerning the value of various functions of the school psychologist. Questionnaires about such perceptions of school psychological services were completed by 50 school psychologists and 400 teachers in western North Carolina. Results supported the hypothesis that the importance of the school psychologists' roles was perceived differently by school psychologists and teachers. Both groups perceived the school psychologist as devoting most of his work time to psychoeducational assessment. However, psychologists ideally wanted to spend most of their time in consultation with teachers; teachers preferred that psychologists engage in more student counseling. On written psychological reports, teachers rated recommendations for behavior management as the most valuable content item. The findings suggest that an appropriate role for school psychologists is assisting teachers in developing techniques for working with special needs students. (Author/NRB)

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DIVERGENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

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paper presented at the
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Divergent Perceptions of School Psychological Services

Introduction

Research (Ford & Migles, 1979; Gerken & Landau, 1979; Hughes, 1979) has indicated that a discrepancy exists between the perceptions of school psychologists and teachers concerning the value of various functions of the school psychologist. The present study attempted to replicate and generalize the findings of these reports and to provide additional data concerning the efficacy of psychological services in the schools. Of particular interest is the potential increased effectiveness of school psychologists through their involvement in a consultative role (if teachers are encouraged to perceive them as such).

Method

A self-report questionnaire was mailed to approximately 50 school psychologists and 400 elementary and high school teachers in Western North Carolina. Two areas of psychological services were investigated. First, teachers and school psychologists rank ordered four roles of the school psychologist (a. psychoeducational assessment; b. consultation and in-service; c. counseling and psychotherapy; d. research and development) according to their importance. In addition, school psychologists ranked each role according to actual time spent in that function. Teachers ranked each role according to time they perceived school psychologists to spend in that function. Finally, teachers and school psychologists were asked to rate from not valuable to very valuable 22 specific services typically provided by school psychologists.

Secondly, teachers were asked to rank order 12 content areas that are generally a part of a written psychological report, according to usefulness

to the teacher as the "consumer" of the information.

Teachers were asked to report how long they had been teaching, how frequently they had referred children for psychological services in the past year, how much time they had spent in consultation with the school psychologist, and to rate, in general, how efficient the school psychologist had been in providing services. School psychologists were asked how long they had been practicing, their level of certification, number of schools and students served, new cases opened per week, and how receptive teachers had been to their services.

Results

Results suggest that the importance of the various roles of the school psychologist are perceived differently by school psychologists and teachers (Table 1). School psychologists place more value in consultation with teachers (interpretation of test results and suggestions of teacher intervention techniques for student academic and off-task behavior). Teachers stress assessment activities, particularly early identification, screening, and prevention.

In a comparison of actual and ideal amounts of time the school psychologist spends in various activities (Table 2), psychologists and teachers report that school psychologists spend more time in psychoeducational assessment than any other activity. Ideally, school psychologists would like to spend most of their time in a consultative role; teachers would like school psychologists to engage in more counseling with students.

Additional information provided by this sample of school psychologists includes the following averages:

1) In an eight-hour day, 47% of the time is spent in assessment, 24% in

report writing and administrative duties, and 17% in consultation and in-service.

2) Sixty-seven percent have level II certification; 33% have level I certification.

3) The number of schools served by each psychologist is 5.4 (range, 4-11) with a combined enrollment of 3000 (range, 1500-5200) students per psychologist.

4) The number of new cases opened each week is 6.4 (range, 3-8).

5) In rating teachers from least receptive (1) to most receptive (5) of psychological services, teachers received a rating of 3.6.

Additional information provided by this sample of teachers:

1) The recommendations section is the most valuable part of a written psychological report (Table 3).

2) Each teacher referred an average of 2.5 (range, 0-11) students during the last year.

3) In rating school psychologists from least efficient (1) to most efficient (5) in providing services, psychologists received an average rating of 3.47.

4) Teachers with 10 or more referrals in the last year rated the efficiency of the school psychologist significantly higher ($p > .001$ for comparison with an independent t test) than did teachers with no referrals.

Discussion

School psychologists are perceived by teachers primarily as testers. If school psychologists wish to utilize other areas of psychological expertise, (e.g., consultation, behavior management, informal assessment) they must convey to teachers and administrators not only the availability of these skills but

also their usefulness. Although teachers would like for school psychologists to be involved in more direct intervention with the child, it would be more efficient and appropriate for school psychologists to assist teachers in developing techniques for working with special-need-students in the classroom setting. School psychologists should use their diagnostic and interpretive skills not only to assess and identify, but also to provide teachers with specific, relevant, practical suggestions for instruction.

Table 1

Value of Services Provided by
School Psychologists

(Teachers' Rankings)	School Psychologists' Rankings	
(4)	1	Test interpretation
(9)	2	Consultation
(2)	3	Testing
(15)	4	Behavior change techniques
(3)	4	Recommendations
(1)	6	Early identification and prevention
(11)	7	Emergency intervention
(12)	8	Parent education
(10)	9	Diagnostic interview
(16)	10	Teacher education - inservice
(13)	11	Observation
(8)	12	Providing remediation strategies
(7)	13	Follow-up/re-evaluation
(6)	13	Counseling
(13)	13	Psychotherapy
(18)	16	Liaison agent
(21)	17	Report writing
(17)	18	Dissemination of information
(5)	18	Screening
(22)	20	Research
(19)	21	Instructional design
(20)	22	Curriculum planning

Table 2

Rankings of Activities Which Occupy School Psychologists' Time: Actual and Ideal

Categories ranked from most amount of time (1) to least amount of time (4).

	Actual	Ideal
	Psychologist (Teacher)	Psychologist (Teacher)
1) Research and Organizational Development	3.77 (3.07)	3.29 (3.66)
2) Counseling and Psychotherapy	2.59 (2.58)	2.43 (1.60)
3) Consultation and Inservice	2.27 (2.78)	2.07 (2.58)
4) Psychoeducational Assessment	1.36 (1.69)	2.20 (2.11)

Table 3

Teacher Rankings of Usefulness of Content Areas in Psychological Report

1) *Recommendations for behavior management
2) Recommendations for remediation of educational deficits
3) Social skills and social maturity information
4) Academic achievement information
5) Background history
6) IQ test results
7) Objective personality results
8) Perceptual-motor functioning
9) Behavior during psychological assessment
10) Behavior during other contacts the psychologist has had with the student
11) Summary and conclusions
12) Projective personality results

*(1=most useful)

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